

## **Why Consider a Competency-Based Approach to Education?**

The expectations of today's graduates exceed those of past generations. Students who do complete high school are often not well-prepared with the skills and dispositions needed to be successful into adulthood<sup>i</sup>. The workforce is demanding students prepared to communicate and collaborate; use argument and reasoning; solve problems; and use technology and tools strategically<sup>ii</sup>.

Traditional education systems are failing to meet the needs of many of our state's students<sup>iii</sup>. These systems value time spent in age-based classrooms over personalized and flexible learning environments for students. The next generation of students deserves to be prepared for postsecondary education and/or high-skilled careers in a global economy. Without flexible options, students who fall behind are never given the chance to reach their full potential, and too many of those students are at risk of dropping out of school altogether. Students who do complete high school are often not prepared to go onto a career or college experience with the skills needed to be successful into adulthood<sup>iv</sup>.

A competency-based approach to education provides flexible learning options that support student success<sup>v</sup>. Competency-based systems:

- create multiple pathways to career and college readiness,
- leverage opportunities to enhance instruction and to document student learning through technology,
- take advantage of out-of-school learning opportunities<sup>vi</sup>,
- provide supports that meet the specific learning needs of students.

When the content is made relevant and customized to the unique needs of each student, student engagement is increased which can lead to improved student outcomes. A competency-based system can also present an opportunity to achieve greater efficiency and increase productivity<sup>vii</sup>.

Establishing competency-based pathways at the K-12 level can also encourage closer collaboration between K-12 and postsecondary systems as educators from both sectors meet and discuss how those competencies can be "laddered" into industry-based training and college programs, leading to better preparation for entry into the student's career field. Many Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs already require students to demonstrate competency using industry-based certifications so that students more easily transition into postsecondary training or directly into the workforce<sup>viii</sup>. From a higher education perspective, adopting a competency-based system allows colleges to evaluate student learning on a deeper, more nuanced level than traditional grade-based systems. Competencies indicate students' knowledge, skills and abilities and go beyond simple course transcripts. Leaders in postsecondary institutions stated that their institutions review a wide variety of high school transcripts. While some parents feel their children will be disadvantaged in the college admissions, placement or scholarship process if their transcripts do not follow the traditional format (including standard grade point averages and letter grades), leaders from postsecondary institutions "agreed that competency- or proficiency-based transcripts do not present a concern and may be preferable given their increased transparency about what students know and are able to do."<sup>ix</sup>

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- <sup>i</sup> The High Cost of High School Dropouts <http://all4ed.org/reports-factsheets/the-high-cost-of-high-school-dropouts-what-the-nation-pays-for-inadequate-high-schools>.
- <sup>ii</sup> Career and College Ready Michigan <http://www.michigan.gov/mde/0,4615,7-140-28753---,00.html>.
- <sup>iii</sup> Michigan Student Inspiration Project, <http://studentinspirationproject.org>.
- <sup>iv</sup> Different Approaches to College- and Career-Readiness <http://all4ed.org/different-approaches-to-college-and-career-readiness>
- <sup>v</sup> Necessary for Success: Building Mastery of World-Class Skills  
[http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol\\_cw\\_issuebrief\\_building\\_mastery\\_final.pdf](http://www.competencyworks.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/inacol_cw_issuebrief_building_mastery_final.pdf);  
The College and Career Readiness and Success Organizer  
[http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20and%20Success%20Organizer%20Brief\\_FINAL.pdf](http://www.ccrscenter.org/sites/default/files/College%20and%20Career%20Readiness%20and%20Success%20Organizer%20Brief_FINAL.pdf)
- <sup>vi</sup> Michigan After-School Partnership <http://www.miafterschool.org>
- <sup>vii</sup> Competency-based learning or personalized learning <http://www.ed.gov/edblogs/oii/competency-based-learning-or-personalized-learning>
- <sup>viii</sup> <http://www.nrccte.org/core-issues/industry-recognized-credentials>
- <sup>ix</sup> [Postsecondary Support for Competency-Based High School Transcripts - Lessons from the Competency-Based Transcripts Postsecondary Convening - Washington, DC | May 29-30, 2014](#) (pg. 2)